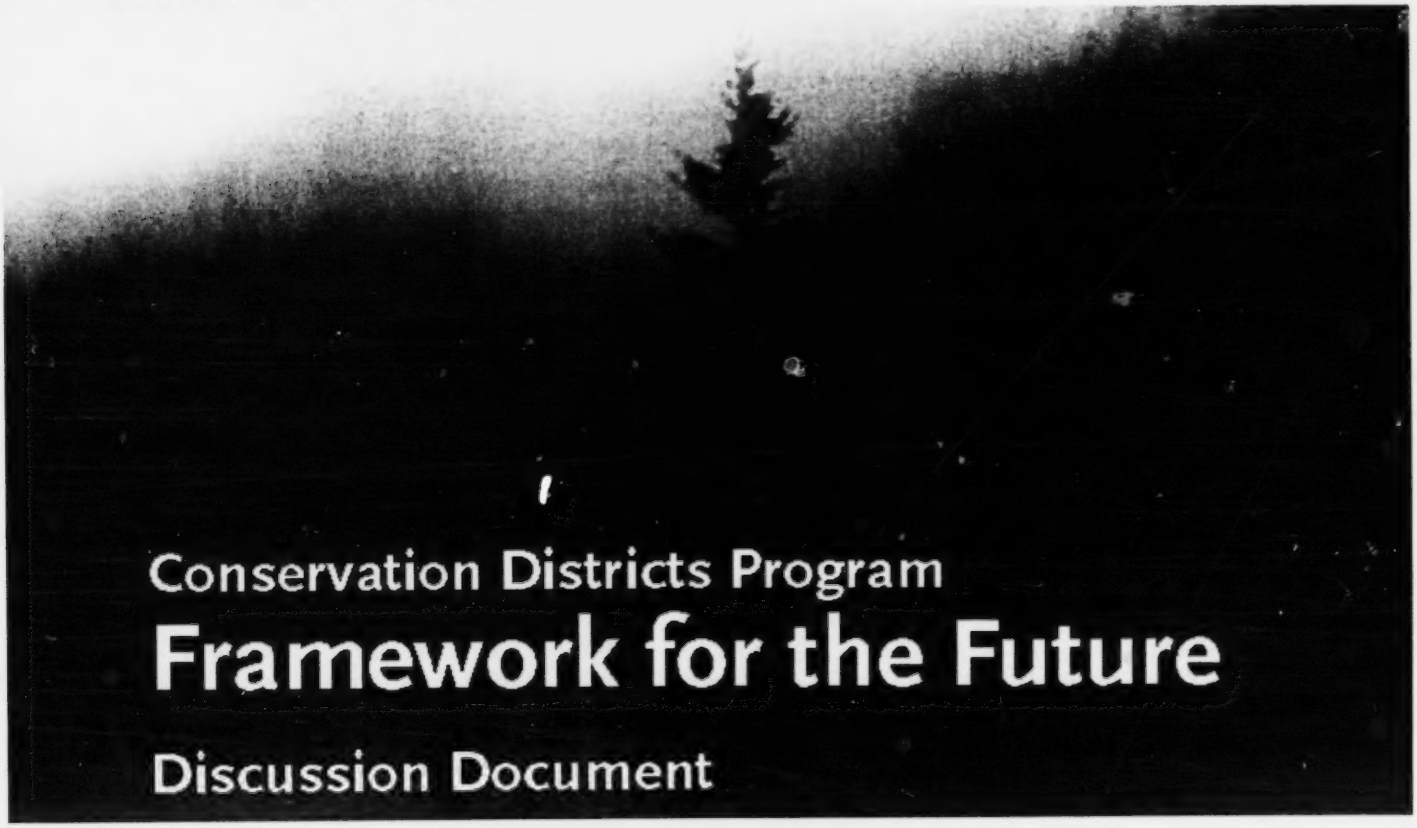
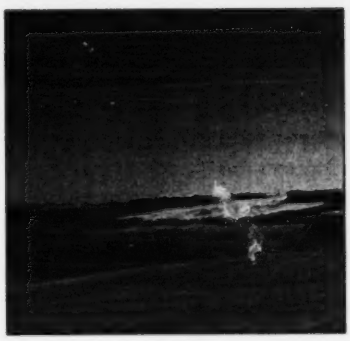
What You Told Us



Conservation Districts Program

Framework for the Future

Discussion Document



Manitoba Water Stewardship, Draft, June 2008

Manitoba

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Honorable Christine Melnick, Minister of Water Stewardship, released the Conservation District Framework for the Future discussion document in December 2007. The purpose of the document was to encourage discussion and comment on the future direction of the Conservation Districts (CD) program.

An extensive consultation process was held with key stakeholders between January and March of 2008. Individual consultations were held with the seventeen CD boards, the Manitoba Conservation Districts Association, The Association of Manitoba Municipalities Resource Management Committee and non-governmental organizations with land and water mandates. Three regional consultative meetings were held across Manitoba for municipal governments input. Public review and feedback was encouraged through newspaper notification and information provided on the Department of Water Stewardship website.

Over 450 Manitobans participated in the consultations. Many provided written comments; others completed questionnaires or commented through email. The majority of respondents supported the goal statements. Some indicated the goals were so "motherhood" in nature, that it was difficult not to support them. Most stakeholder concerns focused on the lack of detail on how to implement goal objectives. There was concern regarding the erosion of local authority with provincial funding being connected to defined provincial priorities. Many stakeholders felt that the goals and objectives went too far in transferring provincial resource management responsibilities to CDs, such as drinking water protection, surface water management and water quality monitoring. There was consensus that the CD program was under-funded and that additional provincial funding was required to meet the goals in the document. Integrated watershed management planning was supported. However, additional provincial technical and planning supports were identified as being needed, as was adequate funding for plan implementation.

Many stakeholders noted that conservation education and extension was not a defined provincial priority in the CD Framework document. They suggested it should be considered a key provincial priority and felt education was important to the future of the CD program.

Overall there was strong support for the CD program, the foundation of a provincial-municipal partnership, watershed based land and water management and locally empowered boards. Most agreed that CD Board structure, operations, and programs needed to change to address changing land and water issues and impacts on water quality. However, the process to bring about change in a partnership program needed to be more inclusive and cooperative.

There was mixed response to the suggested CD funding formula. Although the Minister of Water Stewardship indicated that no CDs would receive funding cuts, the formula example, as presented, resulted in a reduction in provincial financial support to a number of CDs. This resulted in some initial confusion, but was clarified through the consultation process. There was good support for funding in urban areas, separating infrastructure funding from conservation program funding, and providing a base budget for staff and administration; albeit most noted that the provincial contribution was inadequate. Most stakeholders agreed that a fair, equitable transparent allocation of provincial support to CDs was important. However, there was no agreement that area and population were the best factors to achieve this.

The feedback received through these initial consultations is critical to reaching consensus on the future direction of the CD program. A working group of key stakeholders will move forward with producing a revised version of the document for the fall of 2008.

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INTRODUCTION

The Conservation Districts (CD) program includes 18 CDs covering 85 percent of Municipal Manitoba. Since 1999 municipal participation in the program has grown by 90 percent. With the rapid growth of the program, emerging water quality issues, and new provincial directions, the Conservation Districts Commission identified the need to articulate a clear vision on strategies and priorities for the CD program over the next 15 to 20 years.

The purpose of the CD Framework discussion document was to initiate consultation and discussion to clarify the vision, mandate, provincial priorities and goals and objectives for the CD program. The CD Framework document was a starting point and tool for the consultation process to reach stakeholder consensus on the future of the CD program.

This "What You Told Us" document is a summary of the valuable input from the public and stakeholder groups. The feedback and concerns expressed are vital in the process of reaching consensus on the future direction of the CD program.

BACKGROUND

The CD Framework for the Future discussion document was prepared by the Deputy Ministers of the Departments of Water Stewardship, Conservation, Intergovernmental Affairs, Agriculture, Food & Rural Initiatives, and Infrastructure & Transportation.

In the Framework document, direction was provided to:

- Affirm the CD program as the preferred model for effective delivery of provincial land and water policies and programs, in partnerships with local boards and municipal governments
- Define organizational vision statements for the CD program
- Define a CD mandate
- List core principles
- Define provincial priorities
- List goals and objectives, all supporting a new purpose for the CD program, healthy and sustainable watersheds through focused and priority-based funding decisions and measurable results.

The intent of the CD Framework was to focus the work of the CD Commission, local CD boards, municipal governments and program partners by clarifying common goals and objectives, while providing a basis for performance reporting.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Consultations for the Framework for the Future document were held between January 14, 2008 and March 20, 2008. Manitoba Water Stewardship staff met with each of the seventeen Conservation District Boards, the Manitoba Conservation Districts Association, and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities Resource Management committee. All municipal governments were invited to regional consultations in Dauphin, Brandon and Winnipeg. Non-government organizations and federal departments with land, water or environmental mandates were invited to a consultation in Winnipeg. Public review and feedback was encouraged through newspaper notification in the Winnipeg Free Press and Brandon Sun. The Framework document was provided on the Department of Water Stewardship website along with an email address for responses.

All consultations included a power point presentation followed by a question and answer session. All present could ask questions and express their views. Response forms were available that could be left with staff or mailed. Written comments were encouraged.

Over 450 Manitobans attended the consultations and many others sent in comments by regular mail or email. Those attending the consultations had reviewed the Framework document, were well informed, and offered many valuable suggestions.

SUMMARY OF MAIN COMMENTS

PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES AND CORE PRINCIPLES

In general, Manitobans were supportive of the defined provincial priorities with the exception of the absence of conservation education and watershed extension. A number of respondents were unclear on what "sustainable economic development," meant and in practical terms they asked how it related to CD programming. Most agreed that outcome-based performance measurement was necessary to justify future requests for public funding. The question of how best to monitor and evaluate program effectiveness was not addressed in the document.

There was overwhelming support for the defined core principles. The majority preferred the incentive approach; however, a few noted that incentives and application-based programming only works with those who are interested in applying. Some stakeholders suggested regulatory powers should be considered to help CD Boards achieve goals of clean water and healthy watersheds.

CD VISION AND MANDATE

There were very few comments on the vision and mandate statements. Both statements reinforced the land and water mandate and watershed model. Several noted the vision statement was not a vision, but they provided no alternate suggestions.

<u>GOAL ONE</u>: Conservation Districts will be formed on watersheds throughout Manitoba.

The majority of respondents agreed that Conservation Districts should be formed and based on true watershed boundaries. The principle concerns with this goal were:

- Large watersheds may reduce local control.
- Large watersheds may not be manageable (travel time, travel costs, organizing meetings).
- Change will be hard to implement if municipalities do not wish to realign with a neighbor or with new watershed boundaries.
- Municipal participation and involvement should remain completely voluntary within Conservation Districts.
- All boundaries need not be aligned in the same year. This goal will take time to achieve.
- Two dates for achieving watershed boundaries were expressed; 2012 and 2015. One date should be stated.

<u>GOAL TWO</u>: Conservation districts will be governed by local boards that encourage and provide opportunity for citizen consultation and meaningful participation in the decision making process.

Most agreed with this goal, although there were notes of caution. Concerns expressed were:

- If everyone who contributes gets to sit on the board, they may become too large and less effective because of differences of opinion. This may also cause potential loss of authority from locals.
- First Nations, National and Provincial Parks are key stakeholders in Manitoba watersheds, and CD membership should be considered in a manner respective of current municipal partners and funding contributories. Membership opportunities should be extended to these stakeholders to ensure that all areas of land in Manitoba are addressed.
- Partnering is good for watershed planning; diverse interests can be heard in planning activities.
- With respect to CD governance and watershed planning, specific mechanisms, timing and processes to meaningfully involve the public should be articulated.
- Crown lands are significant in a number of CDs and more involvement is necessary.
- Strong and clear provincial leadership will be required to help guide CDs to meet the expectations of the CD program.
- There are no clear mechanisms in place to ensure that the CD program is balancing local concerns with provincial priorities.

- The present guidelines for forming boards should remain the same.
- Municipal appointees are accountable to voters, unlike other possible board members, which raises questions regarding accountability and which interests take precedence.
- The 2009 timeline for establishing a new CD appointment policy seems too immediate.
- The key stakeholders (AMM, MCDA, CDs) must be consulted and included on CD appointment policy.

GOAL THREE: Conservation districts will complete an integrated watershed management plan (IWMP).

While most agreed that integrated watershed management planning was important, provincial supports and liability were the key concerns mentioned. Comments relayed the following:

- The province is clear that the IWMPs are "not intended to demand additional provincial resources and budgets" but it should also be clear that this program should not demand additional municipal resources and budgets.
- Cost is prohibitive and provincial funding is not at an adequate level. Must be funded sufficiently to implement the plan afterward.
- Identifying the issues in an IWMP places the liability and responsibility on the CDs to remediate the problems.
- Assurances and mechanisms need to be in place to ensure a reasonable level of implementation and adherence to approved IWMPs.
- CDs require provincial, financial and professional support to complete these plans.
- Improved access to CD information and transparency regarding CD activities, especially watershed planning is needed.

GOAL FOUR: All sources of drinking water within a conservation district are protected.

Most agreed that this goal was important. However, many felt drinking source water protection was a provincial responsibility.

- Education plays a pivotal role in keeping our drinking water protected. There is a lack of knowledge of the protection, location and susceptibility of our source water.
- Guidelines such as Provincial Land Use Policies need to be followed and regulated by provincial personnel.
- CDs can offer programs to landowners to help protect drinking water sources, but they cannot force them to participate. (How can we protect private land?)
- Source water protection objectives and attributes need to be more explicit with respect to recommended land use practices such as wetland conservation and restoration.

- The Office of Drinking Water or Department of Health should be involved. They could help to implement the drinking water protection programs.
- Liability related to this goal is a significant concern.

<u>GOAL FIVE</u>: Conservation districts will have the appropriate authority and responsibility for water management within their watersheds in accordance with provincial policy and legislation.

Generally this goal statement was poorly supported. It received most of the focus during consultations. Many comments used the phrase "provincial downloading," when referring to this goal. Concerns and comments expressed with this goal were:

- CDs should not enforce provincial drainage regulations.
- The province should enforce drainage regulations and the CDs should encourage responsible water management through incentive programs.
- Province cannot continue to download and not support with funding. How can CDs afford the tremendous costs associated with this goal? How can CDs afford liability insurance? This goal is a huge download of responsibility which RMs could not afford without adequate funding.
- With the devolution of responsibilities, CDs and municipalities are increasingly taking on additional liability and risk.
- Local input in water management is logical when managing local watershed units. Having CDs being responsible would be more desirable than someone completely unfamiliar.
- The province will make the rules and the CDs will be stuck enforcing them.
- CDs will not become "water police."
- More cooperation is needed between CDs and provincial and federal governments.
- How can CDs have any effect on what is done if enforcement and approvals are still completed by the province?

<u>GOAL SIX</u>: CD programming will support initiatives that improve and protect aquatic ecosystems.

Goal six received the least response; most being supportive. Several felt that CD programming currently addressed this issue. Additional comments were:

- It is a mistake to narrowly focus on aquatic ecosystems. It is important to understand the environmental process and focus our efforts on managing water at the first level (raindrop) instead of the final stage (stream).
- It is recommended that CDs adopt a no-net loss of wetland policy.
- Programming priorities should be based on local input rather than provincial priorities. It takes away a local CD's ability to use funding for local priorities by being forced to use a vast amount of budget on the province's initiatives (like protecting aquatic ecosystems).

***GOAL SEVEN*: Conservation districts will support sustainable land use and water management through incentive programming.**

Most comments regarding goal seven were positive. The main concerns were:

- Adequate funding from Provincial government is necessary in order to be successful.
- Education is imperative to make long term change, which requires additional time and expense, which government has not been successful in supporting.
- Incentive programs are often very positive, but you must be working with willing partners.
- Less local authority is developed when the province cuts priorities, especially when funding is linked to provincial priorities.
- This goal doesn't acknowledge the role of education and capacity building in supporting land and water management.
- Some felt that goal five and goal seven contradict each other, five being regulatory and seven being incentive-based.

***GOAL EIGHT*: Conservation District programming will demonstrate measurable improvement to watershed health.**

There was general agreement with this goal. Some concerns were:

- Provincial and Federal Government should collaborate to find a common "measuring stick" to ensure consistency throughout all Conservation Districts in Manitoba.
- To ensure measurable results in watershed health, the Provincial Government must take a lead role in environmental issues and fund these accordingly.
- Education is required to acknowledge that projects are to be measured on change and not on the number of projects completed.
- Outcome-based performance measurement processes and a reporting system must be consistently designed and applied.

PROVINCIAL FUNDING POLICY AND FORMULA

The Framework document proposed a number of funding policy statements and suggested a provincial funding formula. Overall there was support for including and funding urban areas, separating infrastructure funding from land and water conservation program funding, and providing a base budget for staff and administration; albeit most noted that the $78,000 provincial base was insufficient. Most felt the 75% provincial - 25% municipal cost share formula was fair, with some noting it should not be limited to the 5 defined provincial priorities. There was agreement that the current demand driven process for allocating provincial funding was neither fair, equitable nor transparent.

There were a few suggestions on the provincial funding methodology. However, there was no agreement that area and population were the best factors to determine provincial funding allocations to CDs.
Additional comments on the suggested provincial funding policy and formula were:

- Funding at Provincial levels must increase if the results indicated in this document are to be achieved.
- It is not clear how the funding framework will reflect progress toward watershed and/or public goals.
- One option is for funding to be based on an index which measures need as well as discernable progress or contribution to goals. Alternatively, provincial funding could be allocated for activities that contribute to Provincial goals and local funding toward regionally specific goals.
- There appears to be no financial implications of failing to prepare or implement an IWMP, and in general, of failing to attempt to reach any of the goals outlined in this CD program review document.
- Funding should be more accurately reflected by the population of the province as a whole, compared to the population of each CD.
- The current policy of not being able to carry funds over from year to year prevents CDs from conducting large scale projects and encourages last minute unplanned spending.
- In many rural areas there is a constant decrease in population, with the land still being used just as intensively. Areas with less people will be at a severe disadvantage.
- Funding to pay staff should be increased to possibly keep staff in the CD program. CDs are constantly losing staff to better paying jobs.
- If population remains part of the equation, then other factors need to be considered also. Example: number of animals in CD, number of hectares in crop per CD, number of miles of drains/waterways in the CD, and number of seasonal cottagers in a watershed.
- The idea of a base budget is good, but $78,000 provincial is not enough to support staffing and administration.
- We support separating drain/crossing infrastructure from land and water conservation programming, however some changes need to be made to the present infrastructure-cost sharing formula.
- The CD program cannot rely on provincial and municipal funding for initiatives that CDs undertake. They need to seek outside dollars.
- I support urban participation and variable rate with increased population.

Is provincial funding support adequate to accomplish all of these goals?

- *An Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP)*
- *A 5 year strategic plan*
- *Surface Water Management Plan and Related Policies*
- *Surface Water Infrastructure Management Strategy*
- *Appropriate Reporting procedures documenting suitable watershed health improvements*
- *Annual Budget Process*

- *Annual report card on watershed issues, indicators of watershed health and progress toward goals.*
- *As well as other conservation land use and water services projects and programs.*

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON CONSULTATIONS AND PROCESS

Additional comments were received, mainly with regard to process. They included:

- There was a lack of clear process about information and decisions about the Framework document.
- The CD Framework public review process warranted a public registry file on the Manitoba Water Stewardship webpage allowing the public the opportunity to review all comments.
- The suggested timeline was unattainable. The CD program has been running for 36 years. It takes time to do things properly. We cannot rush social change to reach the goals we want.
- There appears to be significant levels of inconsistency in approach, programs and apparent ability of CDs to contribute to the goals outlined in this review.
- Municipal governments exert too much control over CD programming and priorities. To succeed, the CD program must have its own watershed mandate and operate independent of municipal control.
- Were First Nations consulted? The process to afford First Nations the opportunity to "fully participate and partner in CD planning and programming is not one that can be devolved to CDs.

NEXT STEPS

The Department of Water Stewardship has proposed that the province formulates a working group compromised of representatives from Manitoba Water Stewardship, the Manitoba Conservation Districts Association, and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities to move forward with developing a second draft of the CD Framework for the Future discussion document. Valuable feedback and comments through the initial consultation need to be incorporated into a new draft.

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